

VZCZCXRO0919
RR RUEHAO
DE RUEHTC #0642/01 0831340
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 241340Z MAR 06 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5208
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 1645
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 0140
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 0607
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 1135
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ 0410
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 0801
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0143
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO 0221
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0033

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 000642

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/24/2011

TAGS: PREL MARR PGOV BL CU CO NT VE NL

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS: CONCERN SIMMERS OVER VENEZUELAN
INTENTIONS

REF: THE HAGUE 528

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Classified By: Political Officer Ted Burkhalter; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).).

¶1. (C) Summary: WHA PDAS Charles Shapiro met March 15 with Dutch MFA, Interior, MOD and military intelligence officials.

The Dutch message was consistent. The GONL is deeply concerned about developments in Venezuela - its neighbor - but does not currently see a direct military threat to the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. Colombian paramilitary demobilization, counter-narcotics, gangs and the future of Cuba are all on the Dutch radar screen. End summary.

Venezuela and the Netherlands Antilles: Tempered concern

¶2. (C) GONL officials consistently expressed dismay over the direction President Hugo Chavez is taking Venezuela. According to MFA Director General for Political Affairs (P equivalent) Hugo Siblesz, the GONL is "quite aware" of developments in Venezuela and is not pleased. Its concern, however, focuses on the Dutch islands. Foreign Minister Bot has been trying unsuccessfully for six months to arrange a meeting with Chavez, to warn him not to trifle with the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. The Dutch ambassador in Caracas had to wait eight months, before presenting his credentials on March 15. Nonetheless, most civilian officials expressed confidence that, as long as the islands are part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Venezuela will keep at arm's length. They were encouraged by the results of January's local elections in the Antilles, where pro-Chavez politicians were thoroughly trounced.

¶3. (C) Dutch military intelligence analysts were more cautious, saying Venezuelan political activity in the Antilles remains a major concern. They felt that the constitutional reform process, now underway, could create opportunities for Chavez to meddle. As Ministry of Interior officials made clear, Dutch attitudes toward Curacao's and St. Maarten's aspirations for increased autonomy are hardening. If the islands want more autonomy, they are going to have to develop the capacity to enforce customs, immigration and judicial standards. Moreover, there is a growing feeling within the Dutch parliament that some core governance functions need to revert to Dutch control. This

could cause difficulties, that Chavez could seek to exploit.

EU weapons sales to Chavez: Normal replacement cycle

14. (C) GONL officials were satisfied that Venezuelan purchases of rifles, aircraft and maritime vessels are innocuous. Military intelligence analysts said Venezuelan plans to purchase 100,000 rifles pre-date Chavez, and the purchase of aircraft is part of a normal replacement cycle. The analysts added that patrol vessels, to be sold by the Spanish parastatal Navantia, are primarily of a counter-narcotics and coastal patrol nature. Ambassador Shapiro noted that Guyana police officials have already complained of criminals obtaining old, discarded Venezuelan rifles. Moreover, he said, any Venezuelan arms procurement risks worrying the Colombians and distracting them from pressing internal issues. (Note: The MFA informed us on March 21 that the GONL has blocked the proposed sale of some Dutch-made shipboard weapons systems to Venezuela. Others were approved, and at least one request is pending. We have requested details. On assault rifles, we are not certain the plans to purchase the rifles do indeed pre-date Chavez. End note.)

15. (C) Marion Kappeyne van de Coppel, Director of the MFA Western Hemisphere Department, emphasized the GONL's hard line on submarine sales. She speculated that Dutch opposition may have played a key role in the French decision, last week, not to sell Scorpene class attack submarines to the Venezuelan Navy.

16. (C) Defense Staff officials (JCS equivalent) said that, although the Venezuelans are clearly engaged in a build-up, the scale does not indicate that Chavez has aggressive intentions. Ambassador Shapiro agreed that Venezuela does

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not pose a serious military threat to the Antilles and Aruba at this time. He said, though, that Chavez clearly intends to develop force projection capabilities in the Caribbean.

Colombian paramilitary demobilization: funds needed

17. (SBU) The GONL is heavily involved in Colombian paramilitary demobilization and reintegration. MFA's Siblez and Kappeyne were concerned, however, that the U.S. funding bottleneck could harm the program. Demobilized fighters, with no jobs or training, are already "recycling" and returning to violence. The GONL has overcome heavy domestic and EU criticism about the program, and it takes particular pride in having led the way within the EU.

Counter-narcotics

18. (SBU) Kappeyne stressed the importance of counter-narcotics in the Dutch approach to Latin America. She reported good working level cooperation with the Venezuelans on this issue. In Colombia, the GONL has just provided \$77,000 toward the UNODCP's coca production survey and is interested in manual eradication programs (reftel).

Gangs and crime

19. (SBU) Gangs, and crime in general, are also major Dutch concerns. The Spanish have suggested The Netherlands, the UK and France cooperate on the problem. MFA DG for Political Affairs Siblez felt that this could be used to enhance EU interest in the region and to redirect EU attention from purely economic concerns.

Cuba: Post-Castro transition

¶10. (C) On Cuba, Kappeyne said that neither EU engagement nor U.S. isolation has produced results. Ambassador Shapiro noted that we are focused on the future, and that our policy aims to ensure that there is a transition in Cuba is to democracy, rather than a succession from one communist regime to another. He added that Chavez's strategic goal is just the opposite and that he is using his oil revenue to subsidize Cuba.

Comment

¶11. (C) The Dutch do not see eye to eye with the U.S. on every issue, but they have been useful in breaking Spain's lock on EU Latin American policy. They breathed a sigh of relief after Chavez's allies were mauled in the local elections in the Antilles but remain alert. Their concerns extend to the PDVSA-operated refinery in Curacao, the largest single non-tourism employer on the island, and hell's problems with the GOV. On Colombia, The Netherlands has been a leader in providing assistance to the GOC demobilization and reintegration program and has brought along Sweden. Frin Minister Bot will visit Peru, Bolivia and Chile March 27, 28 and 29, respectively, and then join Queen Beatrix in Argentina for a March 30 - April 1 state visit. Coordination with The Netherlands in The Hague, Washington and in other capitals will continue to pay dividends.

¶12. (U) This cable has been cleared by PDAS Shapiro.

HUFF